

# RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 656-4068

---

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Nightline STATION WJLA-TV  
ABC Network

DATE April 5, 1983 11:30 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Full Text: Nicaragua

TED KOPPEL: Your tax dollars may be supporting a war that's in the making.

The people on the other side don't call it a war, they call it a U.S. invasion.

The Reagan Administration won't talk about it, but it is being talked about in Congress where some charge that U.S. law is being violated. It's happening in Nicaragua.

Tonight, we'll talk live with the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister, with the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and with a Nicaraguan exile leader in Miami.

[Up theme music]

Good evening.

There is a law which Congress passed which prohibits U.S. military support to any group or individual for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua. The law was framed that way precisely because the Reagan Administration has been quite open about its hostility toward the pro-Marxist government of Nicaragua.

Congress, it appears, was trying to avoid exactly what now seems to be happening.

---

OFFICES IN: WASHINGTON D.C. • NEW YORK • LOS ANGELES • CHICAGO • DETROIT • AND OTHER PRINCIPAL CITIES

Material supplied by Radio TV Reports, Inc. may be used for file and reference purposes only. It may not be reproduced, sold or publicly demonstrated or exhibited.

Senator Moynihan of New York and Senator Leahy of Vermont have both accused the Reagan Administration of breaking that law. Since both are members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, the charges carry particular weight. And there is independent evidence to support those charges.

Peter Torbnjoernsson, for example, is a free-lance Swedish journalist cameraman. He recently returned after two weeks with a group of the so-called Contras, Nicaraguans who are fighting against the government of their country from bases in Honduras.

Earlier today, we spoke via satellite to Mr. Torbnjoernsson, in Stockholm. The film you will see was shot by him.

PETER TORBNJOERNSSON: I have spoken to a lot of Contras soldiers inside Nicaragua. They're all very grateful for the aid that is coming from the United States. They say that it's coming in the form of dollars, but also in the form of arms and in form of communication support and advices from the United States. A lot of the Contras that have been in the Army for a long time -- they have been trained by American advisers inside training camps in Honduras.

KOPPEL: When you talk about weapons, when you talk about advisers, give me an idea of what the scope of this is.

TORBNJOERNSSON: They have airplanes in Honduras. They have radio equipment, which is quite advanced, and they also have a lot of -- much more sophisticated weapons.

KOPPEL: What kind of weapons?

TORBNJOERNSSON: Like mortars -- mortars, and RPGs, which is a kind of rocket rifle, and machine guns.

KOPPEL: When you talk about air support, what kind of air support?

TORBNJOERNSSON: I know for sure that they have helicopters. The kind of airplanes they have, I don't know.

Now, the plan is -- the plan is to liberate the northern part -- what they call liberate -- the northern part of Nicaragua and to have the airplanes come in with new weapons, with new ammunition, and with more heavy artillery.

KOPPEL: You talked about American advisers, about receiving intelligence help from the Americans. Can you be a little more specific?

TORBNJOERNSSON: I know for sure that in these training bases -- and there have been, like, eight to ten bases training people in Honduras -- and at least on every base there have been two American advisers. In some, there have been up to five, maybe more.

KOPPEL: Is it your sense that these were people who were sent over by the U.S. government, or are they the "Soldier of Fortune" types who sometimes can just be hired by the month, by the year for an assignment without having any connection with the government?

TORBJOERNSSON: My very strong impression is that there is a secret plan sponsored by the U.S. government, probably by the CIA, which is now taking form and exploding inside Nicaragua, and I think the same interests that are responsible for this plan and for -- and who have stimulated the upcoming civil war in Nicaragua are also responsible for the American -- the presence of the American advisers in Honduras.

KOPPEL: You've been very careful and very precise in your use of language, so when you say something like "the upcoming civil war," it makes my ears perk up a little bit. On what basis do you say "the upcoming civil war"? It's one thing to have harassment activities along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border -- to talk of an "upcoming civil war" is something else again.

TORBJOERNSSON: My impression is that most, or a lot of the bases in Honduras have been emptied, and that the Contras now are inside Nicaragua. They're recruiting people there. They're fighting there. The plan is to cut off the big -- the main roads to the big cities in the north of Nicaragua, and their plans are very short-term. They say that "we will make the final offensive in July." Some people also say June, May. And I think it's a deep tragedy coming up in Nicaragua which will cost tens of thousands of people their lives.

KOPPEL: Do the Contras, the leaders of the Contras, have any sense of the debate that is going on in this country over the continuing role or, indeed, the existing role of the U.S. government and what is going on there?

TORBJOERNSSON: It's a very strange organization, I would say. There's a military part which is -- has its main headquarters in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. They receive the aid, the instructions, and they work with the United States. And, they haven't been very much affected by the debate in the Congress and the Senate, obviously.

But, then, there is a political section of the Contras. They live in Miami, generally, and they are very much aware of the debate that is going on in the United States.

KOPPEL: Later in this broadcast we'll be talking live with one of the Nicaraguan exile leaders in Miami. But first, our own correspondent, John Cuenanos, has been inside Nicaragua, and he filed this report on the conflict from the perspective of the Sandinista side.

JOHN CUENANOS: It is early morning in the province of Jalapa, northern Nicaragua, near the Honduran border. Amid a tranquil setting, armed Sandinista soldiers control the foothills and major roads. These are some of the thousands of army troops and reserves that have been called to Northern Nicaragua amid reports of a major invasion by right-wing Nicaraguan exiles, a counterrevolution the Sandinistas say is supported by the U.S. government.

FOREIGN MINISTER REVEREND MIGUEL DESCOTO: They conceived it. They are directing it. They are financing it, and the United States is also arming it.

CUENANOS: But aside from the massing of Sandinista soldiers, there is little evidence of a real war here. Instead, there are signs of isolated guerrilla offensives, a smoldering tobacco field in one province; in another, a family of refugees running not from a rebel attack, but from the fear of one.

Since early this year, an estimated 5,000 counterrevolutionaries, or Contras, have crossed over from bases in Honduras to six different regions in Nicaragua. A total of about 300 soldiers, rebels and civilians have been killed. The Contras, who are heavily outnumbered by the Sandinista forces, have been unable to take control of any towns or mount sustained drives against Nicaraguan troops.

The guerrillas hit-and-run tactics have made the combat all but invisible. As proof of U.S. support for the Contras, the Sandinistas point to weapons and ammunition taken from the rebels, arms and uniforms, the Sandinistas claim, were supplied by the U.S.

So far, it appears just the threat of war has benefitted both sides in the conflict. The counterrvolutionaries have gained international recognition, and the Sandinistas seem to have rallied their base of support, the poor in Nicaragua, and that includes most of the people here.

In the end, despite all the talk of war, it appears the sun is not about to set on the Sandinista revolutionary movement. It remains strong here. There may be some dissension, but the people of Nicaragua are by no means rushing to join the ranks of the counterrevolutionaries.

In the words of a prominent local businessman here, "We may be ready for a change in the way government behaves, but, despite what the U.S. wants, we're not ready for another change in government itself."

John Cuenanos, for Nightline, Managua, Nicaragua.

KOPPEL: When we return, we'll talk live with a Nicaraguan exile leader in Miami, and with the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua.

\*

\*

\*

Joining us live now from Buenos Aires is the Reverend Miguel Descoto, Foreign Minister of Nicaragua.

Mr. Descoto, from that last report we just saw, it seems hard to believe that there is a serious attack being launched against your country.

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: Well, if you think that in order to be serious it has to be the type of an attack that can really -- that signifies a threat for the continuation of the Sandinista government, then, obviously, this is not anything so big.

But, when you're talking about invasion of several thousands of people into another country, this is something very serious, especially when this invasion is orchestrated, is organized, is financed, and armed, as I've said before, by the greatest power in the world against Nicaragua, we think it's very, very serious.

Although, we don't mean by that even to imply that there is any possibility of them being able to achieve their goal.

KOPPEL: One has to -- one has to raise the question, Mr. Descoto, that if, as you put it, the greatest power in the world were to put its mind to overthrowing the government of a relatively weak country, such as Nicaragua, why it is that that would be such a fruitless venture?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: Because there are bridges, as you well know, that even Mr. Reagan, with all his might, is not able to do everything that he would like to do. Why were

they not able to defeat -- I'm talking about a few years back, quite a few years back -- Sandino [?] -- how come they were not able to win in Vietnam?

They can't always do everything that they would like to do. They have to be worried about certain constraints, and about -- they have to be worried about the American people, in general. They have to worry about Congress. They have to worry about international public opinion.

KOPPEL: But, in terms of the military threat itself, you are not worried?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: We are not. Except, of course, we are very much concerned because there are many innocent people dying in the process.

KOPPEL: Let me, then, turn to one of our other guests. With us now, live from our affiliate, WPLG in Miami, is Edgar Chamorro, a member of the political directorate of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, an exile group that claims to have six to seven thousand fighting in Nicaragua today.

You've heard what the Foreign Minister has to say. He doesn't seem to take your threat very seriously.

EDGAR CHAMORRO: Well, if he doesn't take it seriously, it is because he's playing some kind of a -- it's a technical, tactical defensive maneuver. We have the capability. What we are really planning is to bring Nicaragua -- the Nicaraguan government -- to create the conditions so that we have a truly democratic government.

KOPPEL: But you plan to do that by force.

CHAMORRO: Well, we want to let them know that the Nicaraguan people is tired of the betrayal, of all the terror, of the police state they're creating in Nicaragua, of the extermination of the Indians, the Mestizo Indians in the northern area of Nicaragua; that we are fed-up with all their rhetoric, their lies. They betrayed the revolution. The revolution was a broad coalition front that had promised a democratic, pluralistic society, not all the terror, police state they have created with all the Marxist-Leninist indoctrination of the youth, and all the persecution of the church, all the 4000 prisoners, all the killings, like Jorge Salazar, and all the political dissidents, repressed, is silent La Prensa haven't been out for a week. You know, silencing people -- there -- more and more Nicaraguans are leaving -- are leaving the country. Perhaps 300,000 Nicaraguans are away.

And then one thing, if they are so -- if they are not afraid, why did -- why don't we hold elections? Why don't give

elections for the Nicaraguan people? We can finally vote. We haven't voted.

KOPPEL: I -- I'll put that question to Mr. Descoto in just a moment, but let me ask you one other question.

How do you respond to what he said about the "bridle," as he put it, that is on the Reagan Administration that will limit the kind of support you and -- and your people can expect from the United States?

CHAMORRO: I -- I don't understand the word you use.

KOPPEL: Bridle is the kind of thing you put on a horse, you -- you know, the restraining leather straps and the metal bit in the mouth.

CHAMORRO: And who's putting that on whom?

KOPPEL: The Congress, with its laws, is putting on the Reagan Administration. There -- there is a specific law that prohibits any American assistance to you and your supporters for the purpose of overthrowing the government in Managua.

CHAMORRO: Well, we are not overthrowing the government of Managua. Our plans are not to overthrow. The people of Nicaragua has an internal problem. They might end up overthrowing them. But we, as a movement -- our movement is -- is not -- we don't have that plan. We have the plan to create or to bring the condition so that we are a democratic, a true revolution.

Let's go back to June 23rd, 1979, when we agreed to the overthrow of Somoza, number one. Number two . . . .

KOPPEL: Mr. Chamorro, forgive me. I -- I'm afraid the restrictions of this program are such that we just don't have the time to go into all of that.

Let me go to Mr. Descoto for a moment.

The chances of an uprising in your country -- it happened once. Why can't it happen again?

Mr. Descoto?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: I'm not able to hear you anymore. I didn't hear what Mr. Chamorro said either.

KOPPEL: Well, I'm sorry. Then we'll have to go back to Mr. Chamorro. You have an opportunity after all.

What makes you think, Mr. Chamorro, that there will be another uprising in the country? There has been no evidence of it in Managua.

CHAMORRO: Well, our fighting is not so far in the populated areas of the Pacific. Our fighting has been in the northern area where we have the great support. I would like to respond to this -- the point that Mr. Descoto made that we --we don't have the popular support.

It's amazing. I mean, one of the most surprising things is this -- popular support of the FDN, Democratic Forces, are found in the northern area around Matagalpa, Jinotega, Neasegovia[?], Esteli, the Mestizo Coast[?], you know, So I --I think we do have the support, and we have the people willing, you know, to make, again, an insurrection.

KOPPEL: All right, Mr. Chamorro, let's take a break right now, since Mr. Descoto can't hear you right now. Hopefully we can get our technical problems resolved.

What is the extent of the U.S. role in Nicaragua? Well, when we return we'll discuss that question with the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick.

\*

\*

\*

With us now live from our studios in New York is Jeane Kirkpatrick, the Ambassador from the United States to the United Nations.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick, I'm sorry to belabor you at this point but you know it has to be asked. If indeed it is against the law, why then does there seem to be so much evidence that suggests that the United States government is breaking the law with regard to giving assistance to those who are, in one form or another, fighting some kind of an action against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua?

AMBASSADOR JEANE KIRKPATRICK: But, of course, the United States government isn't breaking the law, and the United States government wouldn't break the law, and I think that's perfectly clear.

KOPPEL: Well, then let's -- let's ....

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: I also think that's a really serious charge, if I may say so.

KOPPEL: Well, then, let me read you, at least, a segment from the law here. The law "prohibits U.S. military support," and I'm quoting now, "to any group or individual not



a part of the country's armed forces for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua, or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras."

Now, we have seen some evidence. We have heard of other evidence, of U.S. support, both financial and military, to the forces called the Contras in Honduras who seem to be determined to, and who, indeed, have been followed into Nicaragua using American weapons, or weapons supplied by the United States. I agree with you it's a serious charge, but how do you respond to the evidence that you've seen and heard?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: I think that the evidence that we've seen and heard has, quite frankly, nothing to do with the law. Whatever we're doing inside -- whatever support we are offering -- and I didn't say we're offering any -- but if we are offering any support to anyone in Nicaragua, it's with the permission of the Congress, and it's certainly not against any law in the United States.

KOPPEL: That particular -- that particular law, Madame Ambassador, as I read it to you, seemed so precise that it's hard -- maybe you can explain to me how it is that if we are giving any assistance at all, be it monetary or. . . .

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: Mr. Koppel, first of all, I'm sure you know enough about American government to know that if we're spending any money -- and to give them any help we would have to be spending some money -- and if we're spending any money, it's the Congress who's appropriated the money.

KOPPEL: And I also know enough about the law, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, to know that there are discretionary funds. And we're not talking about huge sums here. I mean, certainly for a private individual we are, but not by government standards. We're talking 20, 30 million dollars.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: Mr. Koppel, I think the law that you just read talks about spending any monies for the purpose of overthrowing the government in Nicaragua, or bringing about a war between Nicaragua and Honduras.

KOPPEL: Right.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: And I can assure you that the last thing our government would want is a war between Nicaragua and Honduras. And I can assure you also that the U.S. government isn't spending any money trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua.

They -- there are various other possibilities, of course. The fact is that the Nicaraguan government has for nearly three years now, virtually since it came to power, been engaged in breaking its promises to the Nicaraguan people, and to the OAS for free elections and internal reconciliation, and it's been -- it's been repressing its own people progressively, and it's been arming, training and directing from its own territory a very large guerrilla effort, a guerrilla war against the government of El Salvador, and terrorist acts against the the government of Honduras and, to some extent also, threats to Costa Rica as well.

The United States has tried very hard -- the whole U.S. government has tried very hard -- to persuade the government of Nicaragua to live at peace with its neighbors. The government of Honduras has, government of El Salvador has, the government of Costa Rica has. They've tried very hard to persuade the government of Nicaragua to end the export of arms into the area, the importation of arms into the area, and the export across national lines. They've tried to persuade the government of Nicaragua to end the importation and use of foreign advisers. And the government of Nicaragua has continued in an absolutely relentless way to support foment and support and direct internal wars against its neighbors.

KOPPEL: Mrs. Kirkpatrick, if you'll forgive me, I don't think the issue at the moment is whether these are particularly admirable people. They may indeed be a bunch of scoundrels, but the U.S. law does not address that particular issue.

I wonder if you can explain to me under what guise, if indeed it is not for the purpose of overthrowing the government -- under what guise, then, is the U.S. government supporting the Contras in their military forays into Nicaragua.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: Well, first of all, I didn't say the United States was supporting the Contras.

KOPPEL: You came awful close.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: Some other people have said the United States was supporting the Contras.

KOPPEL: Among them, two members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: I would simply like to say....

I would simply like to say that I feel quite sure the United States is not breaking -- the government is not breaking

any law. Any one of its own laws. The fact is that the United States government would like very much, though, to persuade the government of Nicaragua to cease supporting guerrilla war against its neighbors. It would like very much to persuade the government of Nicaragua to negotiate a settlement -- a peace in the area, to seek a political solution, in fact, to the problems of the region, and not to continue to foment guerrilla war against its neighbors.

It would also like to persuade the government of Nicaragua, in fact, to cease repression of the people in Nicaragua.

Now, those kinds of persuasions that can be tried with a government -- and one of the kinds of persuasions that can be tried to persuade a government to go to negotiation in principle is various kinds of pressure.

KOPPEL: Among -- among them military?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: It could be -- could be. In principle, it could be.

If you have economic pressure and it fails, and you have moral pressure and it fails, and you have political pressure and it fails because you've got a repressive regime that's progressively totalitarian in character, then, in fact, the United States might conceivably decide that it would like to enhance the pressure on the government of Nicaragua for the purpose of attempting to persuade the government of Nicaragua to negotiate peace in the region, and to cease fomenting and making civil war against its neighbors.

KOPPEL: Mrs. Kirkpatrick, you are familiar with the fact that the Swedish journalist we had on today is not alone. There have been several other journalists who have just come back from that area. They're all reporting essentially the same thing. Someone from "Time." Someone from CBS. There have been people from the "Washington Post," and they are all coming back, and they are all not simply under the impression -- they're prepared to testify to the fact that the United States is financially -- and in terms of equipment, and in terms of advice -- helping these people, the Contras, in their actions against Nicaragua.

Now, if it is possible to avoid ambiguity, could you just respond by saying, if you're saying we're not breaking the law, that these things are not happening. Can you deny that?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: No, no, no, not at all. What I will respond by saying, and very directly, without any ambiguity at all, is that the United States government is not engaged in an effort to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. There's nothing ambiguous about what I'm saying about that.

KOPPEL: Let me jump in for just one moment to warn our affiliate -- and there's nothing ambiguous about this -- I'm afraid we're running over at the moment, and we're going to run over for a few moments so we can at least try to resolve this issue.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick, then, perhaps you would be good enough to -- to draw that distinction for me. The U.S. government, by inference, you seem to be saying, or by implication, you seem to be saying, is assisting the Contras, but not to the end of overthrowing the government. Is that the distinction?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: Mr. Koppel, you know that it's the policy of the U.S. government and its officials not to comment either affirmatively or negatively on that question.

I'm saying, however, that there is a significant distinction between assisting persons who might be harassing a government in the effort to bring them to elections and negotiations and an effort to persuade them to cease making war on their neighbors, and the effort to overthrow the government. Now those are different activities, in fact.

KOPPEL: All right. So as I understand you, then, it is the distinction between overthrowing the government and convincing a government to have elections. So this is all part of encouraging the electoral process, then?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: I didn't say that. I said that's a distinction that is significant. It's also, it you know, can very well be part of a process of encouraging negotiations. We would like very much to see the government of Nicaragua negotiate with its neighbors an end to all conflicts in that region, an end to the importation of arms, an end to the use of foreign advisers and, above all, a democratic settlement for the region.

KOPPEL: All right.

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: That is our goal in Nicaragua.

KOPPEL: Mrs. Kirkpatrick, as you know, because of technical problems we had some trouble getting Foreign Minister Descoto of Nicaragua on before. You have indicated that you would prefer not to be on on the same segment with him. I'm going to honor that, but we will be coming back in just a moment to give him an opportunity to make some remarks also.

Thank you very much for your participation. We'll be back in just a moment.

\*

\*

\*

Joining us once again from Buenos Aires, the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua, Mr. Miguel Descoto.

Mr. Descoto, you heard what Ambassador Kirkpatrick had to say. The U.S. government denies that it is engaged in any efforts to overthrow your government, but it clearly would like to encourage your government to hold elections, and that doesn't seem like such a bad goal. Why don't you?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: Well, I don't think, really, that that is the issue tonight -- whether or not we have elections.

The issue is whether or not the United States is in fact engaging or waging a war against Nicaragua. Isn't that the issue?

KOPPEL: Well, Ambassador Kirkpatrick -- you asked a question, so let me respond to it.

Ambassador Kirkpatrick has -- has flatly denied that there is a war against Nicaragua, or that, indeed, the U.S. government is encouraging anyone to overthrow your government.

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: If you really analyze what she said, I think it is very clear that she even -- she was very confused. She was very nervous, and she actually ended up admitting and then trying to go back and say that she had not admitted it, and then saying that in principle the United States could do it, forgetting, as a matter of fact, that they are internal laws.

And, besides, I don't care so much about internal laws. There are principles of international law. There is a Charter of the United Nations. The United States is a member. It is not only a member of the United Nations, it is a member of the Security Council. It is obliged to respect those principles.

If the United States has any quarrel with Nicaragua, there are ways and means that it can bring the charges before the international community, before the United Nations.

KOPPEL: Mr. Descoto, since you -- since you heard what Ambassador Kirkpatrick said, you also know that she drew the same fine distinction on the law that you are drawing right now with regard to Nicaragua's activities insofar as encouraging the fighting in El Salvador is concerned.

If you're so worried about that kind of international activity, why does not your country cease it?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: Well, first of all, let me tell you that Salvador is an independent country. If Salvador ever felt that we were infringing any law, it is incumbent upon El Salvador to bring their case before the Security Council. They have never done so. We have pled our case, and we have demonstrated.

The United States, as you know well, produced that famous, or infamous, if you want, "White Paper," which Mr. Eagleburger [?] tried to peddle and sell in Europe, and it was so quickly discredited by the United States....

[Confusion of voices].

KOPPEL: Let -- let me -- you -- you've made a very interesting offer, I think. And I want to be sure that it is indeed an offer.

You're saying that if the government of El Salvador came to the Security Council of the United Nations and asked your government to stop interfering in its internal affairs, you would stop doing so, is that right?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: No, I didn't say that at all. That if they had -- they believed that we were doing that and they had the proofs, they could present them to the Security Council, for example. Why don't they?

We have believed that the United States was preparing to invade Nicaragua, and we brought our case a year ago to the Security Council. Now the invasion has indeed taken place. And once again we brought the issue to the Security Council. And all we get from the United States is this very cynical type of response, saying, "Well, it is not in our tradition or in our custom to speak about covert actions against another country," and all of this type of set [?] logic.

KOPPEL: In point of fact, Mrs. Kirkpatrick did not say any of that, at least not this evening. She simply said that the U.S. government was not trying to overthrow your government, but that it -- but that it was trying to encourage your government to hold elections.

Now, since you've been good enough to answer your own question, would you go back to my original question. Why doesn't your government hold elections?

FOREIGN MINISTER DESCOTO: Our government committed itself to holding elections right after the overthrow of

Somoza, and there were people in the government who wanted to have elections right away. There was a debate that opened up. As a matter of fact, it was the conservative parties and the private sector who opposed the idea of having elections immediately. They said that in the heat of the victory, then, it would be inevitable for the friends of Sandinista to sweep at the ballot boxes. And, therefore, they -- we decided to postpone elections after a six-year period of national reconstruction.

This is exactly what we have done. This issue of elections has never been an internal issue. It's just the pretext, or an excuse, that the United States -- Reagan Administration -- uses in order to render more palatable, more acceptable the very hideous, criminal policy that have adopted against Nicaragua.

KOPPEL: All right, Foreign Minister Descoto, thank you very much.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick has decided to at least give us the benefit of some closing comments.

Ambassador Kirkpatrick?

AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK: You know, Mr. Descoto always appalls me, quite frankly. He appalls me, first of all, because El Salvador so clearly is a victim of Nicaraguan aggression, and Nicaragua continues to foment aggression against its other neighbors, its democratic neighbors as well. And then Mr. Descoto quotes the commitments of the U.N. Charter, international law, and so forth, against interference in the internal affairs in another country.

And, as -- the Sandinista junta rules Nicaragua as a military dictatorship. They don't share any power with anybody. They've ruled under martial law state of seige for more than a year now, and yet he talks about the people making a decision not to have elections. It -- you know, this is fraud, and I'm afraid that the government of Nicaragua fairly regularly engages in it.

KOPPEL: All right. Ambassador Kirkpatrick, Foreign Minister Descoto, thank you both for joining us this evening.